FAITH & THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The Enslaving Worry About Earthly Security

What the Christian Tradition Actually Says

> *"Save me from the blind love of pleasure and from the enslaving worry about earthly security. Grant me the freedom of those who live for heaven."*
>
> — My Daily Bread, p. 96 (Confraternity of the Precious Blood)

There is a pressure that settles over anyone who has lost a job, a role, or a season of financial stability: the pressure to prove, through sheer volume of activity, that you are serious. The culture around us copes with uncertainty through frantic motion — more applications, more networking, more optimization. And when we resist that frantic motion, we can feel as though we are failing, or worse, that others think we are.

But the Christian tradition has a different diagnosis entirely — and a different prescription. What follows is a map of that tradition, from scripture through the Desert Fathers through Aquinas, organized as both a reference and a reflection for anyone trying to navigate unemployment, instability, or prolonged uncertainty with their faith intact.

QUICK REFERENCE — BATTLE CARD

CULTURE SAYS	TRADITION SAYS
Increase activity to reduce uncertainty	Reduce fear so action becomes accurate

SCRIPTURE

Mt 6:25–34 — Anxiety adds no control. Life is more than survival management.
Move: from self-provision as identity → trust in the Father's care

James 1–4 — Trials are real but not meaningless. Instability reveals what is anchored.
Antidote to double-mindedness: patience and endurance, not panic

TRADITION

Desert Fathers	Watch thoughts without obeying them. Return to prayer and simplicity.
Augustine	Anxiety = loving security more than God. Cure: re-ordering of desire.
Aquinas	Your work and search are real means of providence — not ultimate sources of control. Prudence: right action at the right time, not frantic, not passive.

WHEN ANXIETY RISES — THE TRADITIONAL MOVE

1. Pause. Do not multiply frantic action. Notice the spiraling thought.
2. Return to prayer — simple, repetitive is fine.
3. Take one appropriate action. Not many.
4. Release outcome control. This is the step that costs something.

DISCERNMENT, NOT COMPULSION

Selective response to interior prompts, staying in prayer, doing daily duties, reaching out relationally when it arises naturally — this is what the tradition calls discernment. It is not laziness. It is the practice James, Cassian, and Aquinas all point toward.

The tradition does not ask you to eliminate uncertainty or effort.
It asks you to remove fear as the governing principle of action.

THE SCRIPTURES IN FULL (RSV)

MATTHEW 6:25–34

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your

heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day."

Note the final verse: Jesus does not deny that today has trouble. He denies that tomorrow's trouble is yours to carry today.

JAMES 1:2–8, 12; 4:13–15

"Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord… Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him."

"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and get gain'; whereas you do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and we will do this or that.'"

"Double-mindedness" in James is not weakness of character — it is divided attention between God and survival control. The cure is not more willpower but more anchoring.

What the Tradition Says

The tradition is remarkably consistent across centuries and temperaments. Whether you read the Desert Fathers, Augustine, or Aquinas, the diagnosis is the same: anxiety is not primarily a response to external circumstances. It is a disorder of attachment — loving security, control, or the approval of others more than God. The circumstances may be genuinely hard. But the anxiety is a spiritual problem, not just a practical one, and it calls for a spiritual response.

Notice that the My Daily Bread prayer names two equal and opposite disorders in a single breath — and that pairing is not accidental:

BLIND LOVE OF PLEASURE	ENSLAVING WORRY ABOUT EARTHLY SECURITY

Escape into comfort. Appetite turned away from God toward sensation and ease.	Imprisonment by fear. Appetite turned away from God toward control and safety.

These are not opposites in the way we usually think of opposites. They are two expressions of the same root disorder: a heart that has placed its weight on something creaturely rather than on God. Aquinas would call both disordered appetite — one grasping toward pleasure, one grasping toward security. Augustine would say both are forms of restlessness. The prayer asks to be freed from both, and names the freedom the same way: the freedom of those who live for heaven.

THE DESERT FATHERS — ON SPIRALING THOUGHTS

Evagrius of Pontus and the Desert tradition identified what they called *logismoi* — spiraling thoughts that take on a life of their own. Fear projects into the future. Identity-collapse narratives take hold. The mind begins to treat worst-case scenarios as settled facts. The Desert prescription was not to argue with these thoughts or suppress them, but to watch them without obeying them — to notice the thought arising and return to prayer and simplicity rather than following the spiral wherever it leads.

This is directly applicable to unemployment. The thought "I have been out of work for a year" can be observed as a fact. The thought "therefore I am finished, unemployable, a failure, and everyone around me knows it" is a *logismos* — a spiraling interpretation that has departed from the facts and taken on its own momentum. The tradition says: notice the difference.

AUGUSTINE — ON RESTLESSNESS AND DISORDERED LOVE

Augustine's great insight is that anxiety is not simply fear — it is misdirected love. When we love security more than God, we will be permanently anxious, because security is never finally secure. The restlessness he describes in the *Confessions* — "our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee" — is not just the restlessness of a pre-conversion sinner. It is the permanent condition of any heart that has placed its weight on something that cannot bear it. Earthly security is real and worth pursuing. But it cannot be the foundation. When it becomes the foundation, worry becomes enslaving — exactly the word the prayer uses.

AQUINAS — ON PRUDENCE, PROVIDENCE, AND FRANTIC ACTIVITY

Aquinas makes a distinction that is especially useful here. Anxiety is not always sinful — care and concern are proper to a responsible person. Anxiety becomes disordered when it is excessive, when it crowds out reason, and when it begins to drive action rather than inform it. The antidote he points to is prudence: not frantic activity, not passive resignation, but right action at the right time according to reality rather than fear.

Aquinas also insists that God governs reality through secondary causes — meaning your work, your search, your phone calls and applications are real instruments of providence. They matter. But they are not the ultimate source of control, and treating them as such — multiplying them frantically to feel safe — confuses the instrument with the source.

ON DISCERNMENT VS. COMPULSION

There is a particular kind of social pressure that falls on anyone who is not visibly, frantically active during a period of unemployment. The culture reads stillness as laziness. It reads selectivity as passivity. It reads prayer as avoidance. But the tradition reads these things very differently. Responding to interior prompts rather than applying blindly, reaching out relationally when someone comes to mind in prayer, doing the daily duties in front of you, staying anchored rather than scattered — this is what John Cassian called stability, what the Desert Fathers called watchfulness, and what Aquinas called prudence. It is not the absence of effort. It is effort governed by discernment rather than fear. That is not a lesser standard. It is a harder one.

The tradition does not ask you to eliminate uncertainty or effort.
It asks you to remove fear as the governing principle of action
so that discernment, not panic, directs your life.